



# **JBVA TODAY!**



*A Weekly Newsletter from the Jesse Brown VAMC, Chicago, IL*

*April 11, 2005*



## **The Director's Corner**

by Stan Johnson  
Acting Medical Center Director

It became very noisy last week throughout the main building of our medical center as construction of the Emergency Services project was initiated. If you recall, the expansion of our Emergency Room area was one of the projects included in the CARES plan, along with the construction of our new inpatient bed tower.

One of our major goals for this project is to increase customer service by doubling the ER bed capacity from eight to 15 treatment rooms. This should significantly reduce the waiting time in the Emergency Room for patients being treated, which is always a goal at this medical center.

The design of the new ER is also very new and unique. The treatment rooms will be in an oval "racetrack" formation, with the nursing station and support services located in the center, enabling staff to observe all treatment rooms from the charting station.

In addition, the Emergency Services project has been expanded to include construction of a new auditorium on the second floor of the main building, on top of the ER. This will replace the auditorium being demolished to make room for the inpatient bed tower.

The completion date for the two projects is targeted for October 2006, but we anticipate the new Emergency Room will open next spring. In the meantime, please pardon our dust....and noise.

**Would you like to receive this newsletter every Monday? It is sent automatically to all JBVAMC employees with MS Outlook/Exchange, but anyone with an e-mail address can also subscribe for delivery to their personal computer. Just visit the VISN 12 internet web site at [www.vagreatlakes.org](http://www.vagreatlakes.org) to subscribe. Employees can also access the "VISN 12" link on the JBVAMC web page, click on "Employee Resources" and scroll down to "subscriptions" to register for the newsletter.**

## JBVA Nurse to Receive Prestigious National VA Award



Carol Mehaljevic

Of the 55,000 nurses working in Department of Veterans Affairs' medical centers, only two are recognized each year as recipients of the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing. And this year, the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is proud to announce that a member of our nursing staff will receive this great honor.

**Carol Mehaljevic, RN**, is the designated charge nurse responsible for the clinical operations of the Operating Room. Combined with her other multiple responsibilities as scrub nurse, circulator and educator, she brings a participatory style of leadership that enhances the team atmosphere in O.R.

Ms. Mehaljevic observes the practices of staff nurses on a daily basis and is responsible for assigning staff to O.R. procedures based on their competency to perform. Since there were no written assessments of the staff's competency levels in specialty services, she developed a self-assessment tool that all staff completed to provide an overall summary of their O.R. experience and skills. Assessing staff proficiencies in knowledge and practice helped her to assign experienced staff to more complex procedures, identified employees to serve as preceptors to less experienced peers and helped to plan for needed educational in-services and self-study packets.

Ms. Mehaljevic ensures that only competent staffs are assigned to any procedure; pairing less experienced

"I have always felt that people that enter any hospital should feel safe and secure in their surroundings. I feel that we are the protectors of a patient's soul. We should always see the moral and ethical value in giving and participating in patient care. As long as I am a nurse, I will always consider it an honor to care for a "soul" rather than a body. Excellence should be the minimum care given in health care and excellence is achievable. It is an honor to serve those that has given me personal, professional and social freedoms. I am very blessed to have the opportunity to give back to those that have given their lives or risked their lives for our freedoms. So, it is wonderful for me to give back comfort and well-being to our soldiers."

– Carol Mehaljevic, R.N.

members with strong preceptors to deliver a high quality of patient care and safety. Inexperienced staffs are limited to one specialty area until the preceptor and Ms. Mehaljevic validates their competency in other areas.

Working to improve communications, Ms. Mehaljevic initiated the "What's New in Your Service" updates during O.R. department meetings to inform staff members of new equipment and important changes in procedures and practices. She is always available for student technicians with questions about special procedures and serves as a resource for surgical residents who are new to the facility.

Ms. Mehaljevic is a Bachelor of Science-prepared Registered Nurse, certified in Advanced Cardiac Life Support and currently enrolled in a Master's of Science Nursing Degree Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is also active within her community – volunteering at an infant care center to educate staff and young mothers on nutrition and health related topics and participating in Career Days at several Middle and High Schools to promote nursing to teens.

## ***This Week at JBVA***

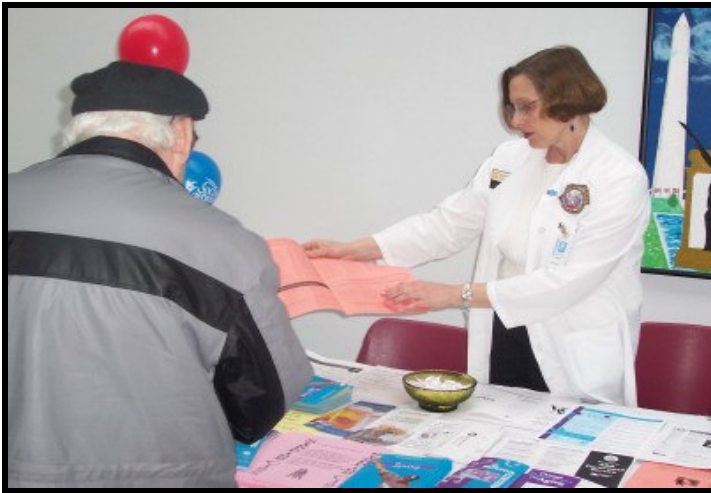
An operational assessment (mock survey) will be conducted at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center this Tuesday, April 12 through Thursday, April 14. All accredited programs should be ready for review.

The survey will use a new method, called the “Tracer” model, in which patient care is “traced” throughout the continuum. System tracers may also be conducted in infection control, information management and medication management.

All VISN 12 facilities will be surveyed this spring. For additional information, call the Performance Improvement section at extensions 56194, 56554 or 57070.

## **National Social Work Month**

Members of Social Work Service set up a table and display in the atrium to promote their month in March. Below, Kay Kezele, MSW, provides information to an interested veteran.



Members of Surgical Service were given a pizza party by the Employer of Choice Committee for winning the “Winter Wonderland” contest. Their Christmas tree was selected as the best decorated by a vote from staff, volunteers and patients.





## And the Nominees Are...

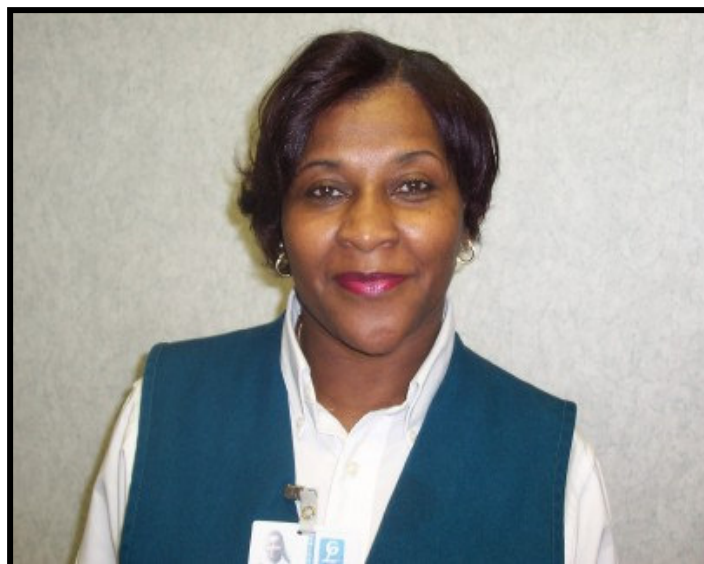
A total of 17 individual staff members and two medical center teams totaling 13 employees were nominated for Federal Employee of the Year honors and will attend the Federal Executive Board Awards Luncheon on May 4 at Soldier Field. *JBVA Today* will spotlight each of the nominees prior to the awards ceremony.



**Milica Jovic, Pharm.D.**  
Pharmacy Service  
Nominee: Outstanding Professional  
Employee

Dr. Milica Jovic coordinates JBVAMC's pharmacy practice residency, a responsibility she accepted while the program was up for accreditation review. Surveyors evaluated 132 standards, found no areas of non-compliance and awarded JBVA the maximum six-year accreditation, which is granted to only 20 percent of the programs. She also coordinates clinical rotations and experiential learning for 80 Doctor of Pharmacy candidates each year in a program so popular that a lottery is held annually at UIC to determine which of the 160-plus applicants will be selected. Dr. Jovic deserves a great deal of credit for JBVA's ability to recruit highly qualified pharmacists during a time of national shortages.

Evelyn Baggett's caring attitude and devotion to her patients is evident to everyone she works with. She always strives to be respectful of patient needs and projects a lively, enthusiastic interest in her assigned duties. Ms. Baggett sets a great example by her willingness to make adjustments in her assignments and tour of duty – an important consideration when meals must be served three times a day, 365 days a year. She works side by side with her Food Service Workers when short staffed and no job is too strenuous for her. Regardless of the staffing situation, she uses her resourcefulness to find ways to serve the meals without compromising quality.



**Evelyn Baggett**  
Nutrition & Food Service  
Nominee: Outstanding Supervisory Employee

## And the Nominees Are... (continued from page 4)



**Geraldine (Darlene) Webb**  
Police & Security Service  
Nominee: Outstanding Supervisory  
Employee

Darlene Webb's exceptional management and leadership abilities have helped her to excel as Manager of Fleet Operations. She is responsible for all activities related to the motor pool, parking garage validations and the transit benefit program. These programs impact thousands of staff, patients and volunteers each day and save participating employees hundreds of dollars each year. Ms. Webb has demonstrated her ability to work with diverse groups of individuals to increase staff morale and accomplish common organizational goals. She was also successful in saving JBVAMC thousands of dollars by putting all of the medical center's GSA fleet under one umbrella of control.

Established in 2002 to meet the VA mandate to reduce the prevalence of overweight patients, this truly innovative team has assisted over 400 veterans (many with multiple medical complications) to improve their health and quality of life. Patients in the program receive a thorough initial assessment, including nutrition and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Veterans complete an eight-week program that teaches them lifestyle skills in nutrition, lifestyle, exercise, attitudes and relationships. A strong emphasis is placed on promoting support and managing social environments that affect weight loss. The team has also been successful in reducing hospitalizations and emergency room visits by instructing patients in the skills of self-management.



Weight Management Team (from left) **Susan Payvar**, PhD; **Christine Clark**, Pharm.D; **Edith Takaki**, RD; **Debbie Cuthbertson**; **Terry Unterman**, MD.  
Nominee: Outstanding Team

# National Nutrition Month Winners...and Losers!

## Bake-Off Competition Results

**Renee Benson** (below) won first prize for her *No Bake Banana Pudding* recipe and third prize for her *Mashed Faketatoes* recipe. **Angie Lozada** (right) won first prize with her *Spinach Dip* recipe and tied for second prize with her *Carrot Cake* recipe.



### Sweets Category

1<sup>st</sup> Prize – **Renee Benson** *No Bake Banana Pudding*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Prize (tie) – **Debra Pater** *Banana Bread*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Prize (tie) – **Angie Lozada** *Carrot Cake*  
Honorable Mention – **Bonita Smith** *Banana Nut Muffins*

### Savories Category

1<sup>st</sup> Prize – **Angie Lozada** *Spinach Dip*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Prize – **Jo Passuello** *Tex-Mex Bake*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Prize – **Renee Benson** *Mashed Faketatoes*.

Congratulations to the winners of the “Hours-for-Pounds” Employee Weight Loss Challenge. The five staff members who lost the greatest percentage of body weight in the month of March were:

**Heidi Westbrook** (Pharmacy)  
**Geneese Gamble** (Mental Health)  
**Shirley Medina** (Nutrition & Food Service)  
**Deborah Barker** (Performance Improvement)  
**Danyeld White** (Nursing)

They will each receive a time off award and be eligible for a second time off award if they keep their weight off or continue to lose.

And a big “thank you” to Veterans Canteen Service for donating prizes for all the winners of the Bake-Off.

Staff, patients and visitors are invited to join us for  
some **MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT** by the **LINDEN,  
MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL BAND**

Friday, April 15 at 10 a.m.  
JBVA Auditorium

Take some time from your busy schedule to enjoy a  
selection of music from a talented group of young people.  
The 48-piece band will play a selection of marches and  
popular music, including a James Bond Medley and a  
tribute to John Williams, composer of "**Star Wars.**"

## Mark Your Calendar

April 19 – Volunteer Recognition Luncheon. 11 a.m. Illini Union Chicago Room, 828 S. Wolcott

April 20 – Mandatory Review Fair: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Lakeside Auditorium

April 26 to 28 – Mandatory Review Fair: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. JBVAMC Auditorium

May 3 – Blood Drive: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. JBVAMC Auditorium

*JBVAMC Today* is published weekly for the employees, patients, volunteers and friends of the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center. Articles of interest are welcome and should be submitted to the JBVAMC Office of Public Affairs (Mail Point 00PR) or by e-mail to [raymond.leber@med.va.gov](mailto:raymond.leber@med.va.gov) or by calling (312) 569-6402 or extension 56402.

The editor reserves the right to use and edit contributed articles. Submission deadline is the Wednesday prior to the week of publication.

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